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NICARAGUA REBELS REPORTED TO RAISE UP TO \$25 MILLION

FORCES GROWING RAPIDLY

Guerrillas Get Advanced Arms and Are Said to Pose Real Threat to Sandinistas

By SHIRLEY CHRISTIAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 12 — Rebels fighting the Sandinista Government of Nicaragua have received as much as \$25 million in donations from private individuals in the United States and foreign sources, according to a retired general and Administration officials who work with the insurgents.

They said the anti-Sandinista movement was growing rapidly, adding advanced weapons and struggling for greater unity.

The guerrillas, widely known by the name contras, now pose a real threat to the Nicaraguan Government, United States officials and rebel leaders assert.

"The end is not in sight, but it is much, much closer," said a high-ranking Administration official who works closely with the Nicaraguan exile groups. "This is not going to take 10 years."

\$27 Million Voted by Congress

The money from private sources is in addition to \$27 million in nonmilitary aid to the rebels recently voted by Congress.

Inadequate training and the low educational and skill level of the largely peasant guerrilla force are of major concern to the guerrilla leaders and to United States officials who monitor their performance.

Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub, a retired officer who plays a key role in advising and raising money for the rebels, said he would like the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest rebel group, to be able to use more former members of the Nicaraguan National Guard. The number of former guardsmen is now kept at a minimum by the civilian leadership because of fear of international criticism of their connections to the previous regime of Anastasio Somoza

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After Congress forbade the Central Intelligence Agency to provide further financial help and direction to the guerrillas last year, the rebel leadership was faced with finding ways to continue to feed, arm and train its forces — functions that the C.I.A. had been performing.

"When the agency was pulled out of this program, these guys didn't know how to buy a Band-Aid," said the Administration official closely linked to the rebel effort. "They know nothing of logistics, the C.I.A. had been doing all of that."

"Since then, they have learned to raise money, recruit and defend their cause in a coherent way. They know how to go on the legal international arms market and buy boots, guns, everything."

Castro's Methods Followed

The official said no group would share in the \$27 million unless it joined a new group, called the United Nicaraguan Opposition, set up by the three best-known exile leaders. He said he was following the methodology of Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader, who normally conditions his assistance to guerrilla organizations on unity.

"You will see broad affiliation with UNO in the near future," the Administration official said, using the Spanish acronym of the new group. "UNO is going to take off. They will probably demand observer representation at the United Nations, like the Palestine Liberation Organization has. And they will set up offices in various capitals."

However, the effort is meeting some resistance, particularly from Nicaraguan groups in Costa Rica, some of which have or have had connections to Edén Pastora Gómez, the former Sandinista hero who broke with the regime in 1981 but who has resisted American pressures to align himself with the Democratic Force. These people have formed a new unity group of their own called the Opposition Bloc of the South, known by its Spanish initials B.O.S.

Mr. Pastora and his men are supposed to be the military arm of the new group, although American officials say that Mr. Pastora has become "a side-show" and that many of his former commanders are now cooperating with the Democratic Force and being supplied by it.

Force's Size Nearly Doubles

Alfredo César, a former Cabinet minister in the Sandinista Government who was a combatant in the insurgency against President Somoza, said that B.O.S., in which he plays an active role, was amenable to unity. But he said previous efforts had failed because the Democratic Force had demanded too much hegemony in the new group.

Despite the cutoff of C.I.A. help and the supply problems of the last year,

the Democratic Force has nearly doubled in size, rebel leaders say. Adolfo Calero, the political-military director of the group, said the growth was because there were "more anti-Sandinistas in Nicaragua than Sandinistas."

"When the last C.I.A. nickel was spent on March 8, 1984, they had about 7,200 men," the Administration official said. "By the time the formal cutoff came in October and the C.I.A. had to pull its people out — and they did come out, every single, solitary guy — they had reached about 9,100 or 9,200."

Since then, the Democratic Force has grown to 16,000 to 17,000 combatants operating out of Honduras or inside Nicaragua, according to the estimates of the rebel leaders, General Singlaub and United States officials. In addition, there are Miskito Indian rebels estimated by General Singlaub at about 2,400 and several hundred guerrillas active from Costa Rica and several thousand considered inactive there.

Further Growth Predicted

Those involved predict that the movement will continue to grow as weapons, uniforms and equipment become available. General Singlaub said it could double again in the coming year; Mr. Calero said he believed it could become as large as the Sandinista Army, which is estimated to have at least 60,000 with active reserves.

"It must be a source of some embarrassment to the C.I.A. that the freedom fighters have grown so dramatically since the C.I.A. aid has been cut off," General Singlaub said. "Now nobody is telling them to conduct operations that don't contribute to what they think is important."

"So they're conducting operations that are designed to get the terrorists out of Nicaragua," he added, alluding to the Sandinista Government.

Administration officials say that according to C.I.A. estimates the Democratic Force has received about \$20 million in private and foreign contributions in the last year. General Singlaub estimated that the total was possibly as much as \$25 million.

Mr. Calero, who is pointed to as the key person in the fund-raising effort, particularly the foreign contacts for weapons, estimated the total at \$15 million, but he said it was impossible to be certain because so many contributions were "in kind" and he often did not have a clear appraisal of the value. He said he expected to continue to use this source for weaponry because the \$27 million authorized by Congress is for nonmilitary use, such as food and medicine.

Freeing Money for Weapons

Mr. Calero, in a recent interview in Washington, would say little about how he has made the contacts in Europe